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Notes

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DID LISCUS SPEAK LATIN?

(Notes on Caes. *B.G.* i. 18.4-6 and on the Use of Interpreters)

In the *Wochenschrift f. klass. Phil.*, May 8, 1911 (No. 19), p. 509, a reviewer who signs himself H. D. is at pains to explain the joke in *largiter posse* (Caes. *B.G.* i. 18. 6; see *Class. Jour.* VI, 77 f.).¹ He admits the existence of a word-play, but thinks that I did not understand it. He says:

Aber worin liegt der Humor? Die Anwendung eines vulgären Ausdrucks ist an sich niemals humoristisch. Dieser Ausdruck aber hatte, wie ich meine, einen gewissen Beigeschmack, er ist aus dem verrufenen Ambitus entnommen. Wenn etwa Murena ein grosses Frühstück veranstalten liess (Cic. *pro Mur.* 74), so hat gewiss mancher gesagt: Hic potest largiter (der kann's reichlich), scil. donare. Diesen Ambitus-Terminus wendet nun nicht etwa Caesar auf Dumnorix an, sondern er erzählt, dass ihn Liscus von Dumnorix gebraucht habe. Also der Gallier bedient sich des bösen hauptstädtischen Ausdrucks, und Caesar verfehlt nicht das wörtlich wiederzugeben. Darin liegt der Humor.

What I said about *largiter* as a vulgar word was incidental and therefore perhaps out of place. I surely did not suppose that it would lead anyone to imagine that I regarded the use of a colloquial word as in itself humorous; still less that I considered it as making a pun. It seemed to me that it would be to insult the intelligence of the readers of the *Classical Journal* to explain, as I now do with apologies, for the benefit of foreign readers, that the pun consisted in the use of *largiter posse* in a double sense; namely, (1) *plurimum posse*; (2) *largiendo posse*. The word-play might be rendered verbally into English, "by giving largess he acquired largest powers," but the exact force of *largiter posse* in the second of the two senses in which it is used seems quite untranslatable. The form *largiter*, rather than *large*, was surely chosen because of the *i*, which is necessary for the play on *largiendo*, not because it was a vulgar word.

The citation of *Mur.* 74 in this connection is apt. Murena might well be said *largiter posse* (the addition of *donare* spoils the pun), and so might Caesar himself and many another. The suggestion, too, that *largiter posse* in this sense may have been current political slang at Rome seems by no means improbable, although it is of course a pure supposition, unsupported by evidence of any kind.

The further suggestion that it was Liscus and not Caesar who originally

¹ The remarks of the same reviewer on my note on *vela cadunt* (*Class. Jour.* VI, 75 ff.) seem hardly worthy of serious consideration.

made the pun seems a truly extraordinary one. To pun in a foreign language, and to be conversant with its high-grade slang, imply a more intimate acquaintance with that language than we can suppose Liscus to have had with the Latin tongue, even if he spoke or understood it at all. That Caesar required the services of an interpreter to converse even with that friend of the Roman people, Diviciacus, is shown by *B.G.* i. 19. 3: "Diviciacum ad se vocari iubet et, cotidianis interpretibus remotis, per C. Valerium Procillum (Toucillum?) . . . cum eo colloquitur." There is no reason to suppose that Liscus was better equipped in this respect than his compatriot; rather the contrary. It hardly seems necessary to cite authority in support of this opinion, but Mommsen, in his *History of Rome*, Book V, chap. vii (Vol. V, p. 30, of the English translation, 1900), says: "In free Gaul itself, i.e., among the Averni, the Roman language was not unknown even before the conquest; although this knowledge was probably still restricted to few, and even the men of rank of the allied canton of the Haedui had to be conversed with through interpreters." Among the "breeches-wearing" Gauls of the south the knowledge of Latin was more general, but even there its quality was not high; Mommsen (*op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 10) says: "This bad Latin was sufficient to enable even the remote Allobroges to transact business with Rome, and even to give testimony in the Roman courts without an interpreter." But the Allobroges, unlike the Aeduans, were within the confines of the Roman province, and furthermore trade was often conducted even at a considerably later period through the medium of interpreters; see Pliny *N.H.* vi. 15: "et postea a nostris CXXX interpretibus negotia gesta ibi" (at Dioscurias in Colchis).

It naturally did not escape my notice that the words *largiter posse* occur in a passage of indirect discourse, but this passage does not report the words of Liscus, as H. D. implies, but the consensus of opinion of Liscus and certain others: "eadem ab aliis quaerit; repperit esse vera." It is in no way evident that the exact language of Liscus, or of Liscus *et alii*, is reproduced; on the contrary, the natural inference is that Caesar as usual gives in his own words the substance of what was said. I therefore had no hesitation in attributing the pun to Caesar, and I still believe that it was unquestionably his own and not a *tour de force* of Liscus in a foreign tongue. It is most probable that Liscus knew no Latin at all. We may possibly grant him a slight acquaintance with the language, but it seems quite out of the question that he should have been able to make so clever, and if H. D.'s supposition is correct, so purely local, a pun as that on *largiri* and *largiter posse*.

The use of interpreters by the Romans must have been very common from the earliest times, since Rome in her early days was surrounded by peoples which spoke languages and dialects different from Latin; and as her power was extended, she was constantly brought into contact with nations speaking foreign tongues. Yet the references to interpreters are not numerous in the literature, so far as our lexicons and handbooks may be trusted. Livy, as Professor Morgan points out (*Lectures and Addresses*, p. 14), finds it necessary

to explain how it was that the people of Fidenae could understand the words of a Roman king, but he seems seldom to mention the use of interpreters. He does tell us that the letters from Hannibal to Hasdrubal which were intercepted by Claudius Nero were read to Nero by an interpreter (Liv. xxvii. 43. 5), whether a professional or a Carthaginian prisoner does not appear.

Apparently the only direct reference to interpreters in Caesar's works besides the one quoted above, although he must have made constant use of them, is in *B.G.* v. 36. 1: "his rebus permotus Q. Titurius, cum procul Ambiorigem suos cohortantem conspexisset, interpretem suum Cn. Pompeium ad eum mittit rogatum ut sibi militibusque parcat"; but that they were regularly employed in dealing with the Gauls is shown by *cotidianis* in *B.G.* i. 19. 3. The use of an interpreter is implied in *B.G.* i. 47. 4, where C. Valerius Procillus (whom it is difficult to think of as a different person from the interpreter mentioned in i. 19. 3) is sent to talk with Ariovistus, "propter linguae Gallicae scientiam, qua multa iam Ariovistus longinqua consuetudine utebatur." Ariovistus, then, in spite of his apparent knowledge of what was going on in Rome, did not speak Latin (at least not readily) and the messages from the *nobiles principesque populi Romani* who would have been glad to hear of Caesar's taking off (*B.G.* i. 44. 12) were doubtless conveyed to him through the medium of Gallic-speaking interpreters. Probably the interchange of speeches between Ariovistus and Caesar was made in the same way. At any rate it is obvious that in the speeches of Ariovistus we have the substance of his remarks reported in Caesar's own language.

The interpreters who are mentioned by name by Caesar appear to be Romans, or more probably Romanized Gauls. Doubtless a few Romans spoke Celtic, although Caesar apparently did not at the beginning of his campaigns in Gaul, but as has been said, it is highly improbable that any considerable number of the inhabitants of Gallia Comata spoke anything more than traders' Latin. Whether the *mercatores* from whom Caesar obtained information at various times (e.g., *B.G.* iv. 20. 4), and from whom his army heard terrifying reports of the size and courage of the German followers of Ariovistus, were Italians or Gauls is not stated. In either case they probably had a slight and mainly professional command of Latin or of Celtic, as the case may be.

The references to interpreters by Cicero are more frequent. He twice refers to their employment in the Senate, in both instances as a regular thing: *De div.* ii. 64. 131, "similes enim sunt dei, si ea nobis obiciunt quorum nec scientiam neque explanatorem habeamus, tamquam si Poeni aut Hispani in senatu nostro loquerentur sine interprete"; *De fin.* v. 29. 89, "ita quem ad modum in senatu semper est aliquis qui interpretem postulet, sic isti nobis cum interprete audiendi sunt." Gellius, vi. 14. 9, tells us that a senator, C. Acilius, acted as interpreter for the philosophers Carneades, Diogenes, and Critolaus. In *Pro Balb.* 11. 28 Cicero refers to a Greek interpreter, one Cn. Publicius Menander, and in *Ad fam.* xiii. 54 to one in his own employ or

household. He twice mentions one named Valerius (*Ad. Att.* i. 12. 2 and xvi. 11. 7).

Not many of the names of the interpreters are given in full. Cn. Publicius Menander was a freedman of Greek birth, as appears both from the form of his name and from Cicero's express statement. It seems probable that in many cases the interpreters were freedmen or slaves, and that the languages which they interpreted into Latin were their native tongues. We may well suppose that their Latin, like the English of foreign guides and dragomans, was fluent rather than idiomatic and elegant. This is especially likely to have been the case outside of Italy, if, as Mommsen thinks (*Staatsr.* I. 352) the magistrates did not bring their interpreters with them from Rome.

Verres employed interpreters in Sicily (*Cic. Verr.* ii. 3. 37. 84), as the Roman provincial governors generally did. In fact Valerius Maximus tells us (ii. 2. 2) that it was a matter of principle to use them whether they were necessary or not: "quo scilicet Latinae vocis honos per omnes gentes venerabilior diffunderetur. Nec illis [the magistrates] deerant studia doctrinae, sed nulla non in re pallium togae subici debere arbitrabantur." Probably their use was necessary, as well as a matter of national pride, where neither Greek nor Latin was spoken, for we know of no Roman whose linguistic equipment approached that of Mithridates the Great, of whom Pliny says (*N.H.* xxv. 6): "illum solum mortalium certum est XXII linguis locutum"; cf. Gell. xvii. 17. 2.

The feeling of the emperor Tiberius about the etiquette of senatorial business in this respect was strong, to judge from Suet. *Tib.* 71: "sermone Graeco quamquam alioqui promptus et facilis . . . abstinuit maxime in senatu. . . . Militem quoque Graece testimonium interrogatum nisi Latine respondere vetuit." Claudius, however, allowed the Jewish princes Herod and Agrippa to enter the Senate and return thanks in Greek for his indulgence; see Cassius Dio lx. 8. This is explained by Mommsen (*Staatsr.* III. 960) on the ground that they possessed the privileges of Roman citizenship.¹

Interpreters formed a part of the *apparitores* of the magistrates and of the imperial court, and are occasionally mentioned in inscriptions: e.g., Orelli-Henzen, 4204 and 6319.

These notes on the use of interpreters, which make no pretense of completeness, may be out of place, like those on *largiter* as a colloquial word, but they seem justified by the neglect of the subject in our handbooks. The indices of the standard Roman histories omit the word, and the topic is treated briefly and in an unsatisfactory manner in the dictionaries of antiquities. The third edition of Smith apparently adds nothing to the article in the previous edition, and the excellent *Dict. des antiq.* of Daremberg and Saglio, usually so complete and thorough, omits the word altogether.

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¹ But according to Val. Max. 2.2.3, the custom of speaking Greek in the senate, "qua *nunc* Graecis actionibus aures curiae exsurdantur," began with Molo at the time of Sulla's dictatorship.